



NEWS RELEASE

32ND INFANTRY BRIGADE COMBAT TEAM

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Wisconsin Guard battalion is nation's best

IRAQ — A Wisconsin Army National Guard infantry battalion currently serving on active duty in Iraq has been selected as the top battalion in the nation's National Guard. Eau Claire-based 1st Battalion, 128th Infantry will receive the Walter T. Kerwin Jr. Award for Readiness and Training as the outstanding National Guard unit for 2009. The award will be presented in October at the annual meeting of the Association of the United States Army in Washington, D.C.

First Battalion, 128th Infantry is now in Iraq, about midway through a one-year mobilization that began in February.

"This is one of those things that happens when you least expect it," said Lt. Col. Leland Ward, the battalion commander. "All I know for sure is this is something that no one individual can claim. It is the collective effort of everyone from the soldiers of the battalion to the leadership at the 32nd Brigade and state headquarters," Ward said in an email from Iraq.

The Kerwin award is named for Gen. Walter T. "Dutch" Kerwin Jr., a former Army vice chief of staff who was the first commander of U.S. Army Forces Command (FORSCOM) when it was established in 1976. FORSCOM was charged with ensuring the readiness and training of all Army units — active, Guard and reserve — in the United States.

Ward gives special credit for the award to his battalion's non-commissioned officer corps.

"In this 'Year of the NCO' I would be remiss not to mention our focus on first-line leaders and their daily effort to ensure the attention to detail required to maintain our readiness rate and mission focus," Ward said.

First Battalion, 128th Infantry is headquartered in Eau Claire and includes Detachment 1 of the Headquarters Company in Abbotsford; Company A in Menomonie; Company B in New Richmond and Detachment 1 of Company B in Rice Lake; Company C in Arcadia and Detachment 1 of Company C in Onalaska; and Company D in River Falls.

The battalion has about 600 soldiers assigned to units presently operating in Iraq at Forward Operating Bases Future, Cropper and Liberty near the Baghdad International Airport, and at Ashraf. The battalion's missions are expected to be completed in January 2010.

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